ANSI's Role in ISO and IEC

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Introduction

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. For those of you whom I have not had the opportunity to meet, I am Oliver Smoot, chairman of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Board of Directors. It will be my pleasure to introduce to you ANSI's role in the global standardization activities of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) and to comment upon the importance of close public- and private-sector cooperation in these important bodies.

It is also my honor, on behalf of ANSI's members and staff, to extend our congratulations to NIST on the occasion of its Centennial celebration. It is not often that one gets to celebrate such an anniversary, and I am very proud to be a part of this special Symposium in recognition of the event and in recognition of the role of "Standards in the Global Economy."

The success of U.S. interests in international standards development is only possible through a strong relationship between the private and public sectors. The positive working relationship between ANSI and NIST is crucial for ongoing success. On December 27, this relationship was further strengthened when ANSI's president, Dr. Mark Hurwitz, and Mr. Ray Kammer, recently retired director of NIST, signed the latest in a series of Memoranda of Understanding between our two organizations. The new MoU is intended to improve domestic communication and coordination on voluntary standards issues among all parties in the U.S. Our goal is to increase the effectiveness of U.S. government agency participation in the national and international voluntary standards-setting process.

Past

Before we explore the future of standards setting, let us first look at the past.

Many of you know about ANSI; its role as coordinator of the U.S. voluntary standardization system, and its role as the U.S. representative to ISO and IEC. But few of you may know that discussions to coordinate U.S. national and international standards development date back to the first decade of the 20th century.

An international meeting of leading scientists and pioneer industrialists was held in 1904 in St. Louis, Missouri. This meeting led to the establishment in 1906 of the International Electrotechnical Commission, the body responsible for the development of the world's electrical and electronics standards. In 1907, the U.S. National Committee (USNC) was formed for the purpose of participating in the IEC. Today, USNC members represent many different sectors of the electrotechnical industry.

Though efforts to develop a coordinated national standards system were also underway, it was more than a decade later, on October 19, 1918, when our nation's nongovernmental standardization system was "officially" born—with ANSI as its coordinator. Founded then as the American Engineering Standards Committee, the AESC was created by five engineering societies and three departments of the federal government—among these was the National Bureau of Standards (now NIST), on behalf of the Department of Commerce. Together, these diverse groups resolved to form a centralized committee responsible for ensuring the development of national standards. These standards were to be produced in a manner that eliminated or minimized waste, duplication of efforts and conflict.

Several years later, in 1926, AESC hosted a conference that created the International Standards Association (ISA), an organization of national standards bodies that would remain active until World War II. Shortly after the War, the U.S. standards community—working in the body now known as ASA (the American Standards Association)—joined with representatives of 25 countries and in 1946 formed the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). By definition, ISO is a worldwide federation consisting of national standards bodies—now, these bodies represent nearly 140 countries from around the globe. Work within ISO covers all areas of technology with the exception of those handled by IEC, and a third international standards body, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

Today, more than 80 years since the founding of the AESC, nearly 1000 members from U.S. industry, academia, professional societies, trade associations, consumer representatives, and government come together under the ANSI umbrella to participate in national and international standards-setting committees, conformity assessment programs, and related activities.

The U.S. voluntary, private-sector-led system we have created is recognized as one of the most effective and efficient in the world today. Our open, decentralized system of standards, testing, and certification mirrors America's culture and commitment to free enterprise. As with our nation's culture, unity does not depend on unanimity, and decisions are founded on consensus with the market determining the optimum allocation of resources.

Present

Given the pace of today's rapid technological changes, increased competition and globalization of markets, a single set of standards recognized worldwide holds increasing strategic significance. Establishing criteria for goods and services, standards impact productivity, economies of scale, and the pace of product development. Standards can also facilitate marketplace access, improve the safety and health of global citizens, and protect the environment for us, for our children, and for our children's children.

The world economy is changing, and the U.S. voluntary standardization system must evolve to meet these new challenges. ANSI's domestic and international relationships and activities offer unique opportunities to confront revolutions taking place in the standards arena.

The Institute's role in the global standardization system is multi-faceted. As the U.S. member body, ANSI participates in 78 percent of all ISO technical committees. ANSI is one of ISO's five largest members, which entitles the U.S. to a seat on the ISO Council, a management body of the organization. Similarly, as one of the four member bodies reflecting the most significant responsibility and productivity within the ISO technical committee structure, ANSI is also entitled to consecutive terms on the Technical Management Board, the group that oversees technical committee operations.

Via the U.S. National Committee, this country participates in 91 percent of all IEC technical committees and provides the chairmen for a significant number of these groups. Only one other country—France—holds as many technical committee secretariats. The President of the USNC serves as one of the 15 members of the Council Board, a decision-making body focused primarily on IEC policy issues and the U.S. is one of six permanent members of the 15-member Committee of Action—the group responsible for the management of the IEC's standards work—and one of twelve members of the Conformity Assessment Board—the body responsible for management of the IEC's conformity assessment activities.

The U.S. has taken a strong leadership role within both ISO and IEC and has been very successful over the years in achieving its objectives. By having strong representation on the governance and advisory bodies of these organizations, the U.S. has been able to effectively influence policies and decisions concerning the direction and overall development of global standards.

ANSI's representation of U.S. interests in ISO and IEC does not come without a price. Our combined dues to the two organizations are approximately $2 million per year. The Institute expends an additional $2 million per year in support of related international programs and efforts.

In June of 2000, ANSI was awarded a grant of $500,000 from NIST to further U.S. interests in areas of international standardization and conformity assessment. Funds were made available with the active support of the House Committee on Science. Congress specified that the grant be used solely for international standards activities, so ANSI allocated the grant money to help pay ISO and IEC dues and to support its participation in the organizations' policy-making bodies.

Commenting on the grant, Ray Kammer said, "Regular U.S. representation at the grass roots level and in key policy-setting committees is critical to ensure consistency of international standards with U.S. standards and practices. Just as many nations are doing, we must be alert to the potential that competitors will use global standards to advance their economic interests and to impede other countries' access to export markets. The grant will help ANSI to represent the United States effectively in ISO and IEC and in the regional activities that often result in international standards."

As a point of comparison, among the United States' top 10 trading partners, levels of government support

for national standards organizations in 1995 ranged from nearly four percent (4 %) for the United Kingdom to 100 percent for Japan, Mexico, China, and South Korea. The $500,000 grant from NIST is equivalent to almost three percent (3 %) of ANSI's annual budget.

Henry Line, who at the time of the grant was serving as chairman of ANSI's International Committee, stated, "Inasmuch as standards are the common denominator in addressing the demands imposed by market forces, it is imperative that U.S. technology be appropriately positioned in all of the global forums wherein requirements are being articulated. The grant from NIST provided significant assistance in ANSI's efforts to position the U.S. at the fore-front of the international standards development community."

Mr. Line also noted that the importance of participation is underscored by the fact that today many standards issues will be resolved at the international level. For companies seeking to expand or protect markets, the ANSI federation offers a distinctive economic opportunity—the ability to influence standards that serve as the basis of product acceptance in many countries.

The basis for product and service acceptance worldwide, standardization is literally the key that can unlock markets from all corners of the globe. Thus, the importance of U.S. participation and leadership in the international standardization process, via the ISO and IEC infrastructures, has never been greater—from an economic perspective as well as from a technological perspective.

Future

As many of you know, on August 31, 2000, the ANSI Board of Directors unanimously approved a National Standards Strategy for the United States. This document, developed over a two-year period with input from a large and diverse group, establishes a framework that can be used by all interests—companies, government, non-governmental organizations, standards developers, and consumers—to improve U.S. competitiveness abroad while continuing to provide strong support for domestic markets and, at the same time, addressing key quality-of-life issues such as the environment. It builds on the strengths of the U.S. system by proposing a set of strategic and tactical initiatives within that framework that can be used by all interests to meet national and individual organizational objectives.

In line with the National Standards Strategy, the U.S. is moving forward with its commitment to lead the international community, specifically the ISO and IEC systems, further toward a flexible, sector-based structure and management and in further stream-lining their processes and operations. Our goal is to promote our vision of a single set of internationally recognized, technically valid standards for each industry sector. Reaching consensus in a global environment will require compromise and a mindset that seeks out win-win solutions.

However, we are a community recognized for our vision and our place at the leading edge of the technological revolution. When we apply our creative influence inward, to our own processes, standardization and conformity assessment programs can appropriately influence the emergence of new technologies.

We have extensively applied information technology both at ANSI and at ISO and IEC to shorten administrative processes and to make the standards approval mechanism more efficient. Probably more important than speed is the rise in accuracy and efficiency resulting from the implementation of IT tools. When used correctly, these tools will ensure that there is virtually no misdirection, misinterpretation, or delay in the expedited development and delivery of standards. Certainly, time and money has been saved, and resources are being freed for the most important component of the standardization process—the content.

By allocating resources to content, not process, we directly respond to the requests of our end-users for "*good*" standardization. And by allocating resources to speed, not administrative redundancy, we directly respond to the need for a faster "time-to-market" for standards suitable for application in a global market.

ANSI also intends to formally propose to ISO and IEC that consideration be given to separating the technical development of standards (i.e., the direct participation of technical experts) from final approval (i.e., the ballots cast by national bodies). We also intend to ask that further consideration be given to whether the current "one nation, one vote"—which ignores both decentralized and regional approaches to standardization—is still the most effective methodology for all sectors.

As these, and other, streamlined procedures are proposed, we see enhanced responsiveness as well as increased flexibility within the standards-setting process. These efforts demonstrate that the formal

voluntary consensus standardization system is responsive to identified needs while continuing to ensure the integrity of a system that has proven its importance to industry, government, and consumers.

In my opening remarks I noted that the success of U.S. interests in international standards development, particularly within the sphere of influence of ISO and IEC standardization committees, is only possible through a strong relationship between government and industry. The need for increased cooperation has never been greater.

From the ANSI perspective, the goal of an industry/government partnership should be improvement and advocation of the U.S. voluntary standards system and the strengthening of the U.S. presence in the global marketplace.

The latest MoU between ANSI and NIST will do much to further progress these goals. It will facilitate and strengthen the recognition of ANSI as the representative of U.S. interests at the international level by all participants, and it will facilitate the implementation of the U.S. National Standards Strategy. The focus on internationalization will certainly help the U.S. extend its reach of influence beyond our nation's borders.

As we fortify our cooperation, government and industry will be able to work together to protect our environment, develop more effective social initiatives, improve safety and health programs, and make improvements in a score of other areas that will result in the betterment of our lives and America's economy.

I look forward to working with you to ensure our continued success.

Thank you.